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REMARKS

ON

HANDEL'S "DETTINGEN TE DEUM."

On the 27th of November, 1743, George the Second, his Court, and England's foremost warriors, assembled in the Chapel Royal, St. James's, to hear the new composition written by the Court musician, to celebrate the success of our arms on the field of Dettingen. This music is now known as the *Dettingen Te Deum*. The battle had been fought on the 26th of June, five months before; and there had been celebrated a thanksgiving service in St. Paul's Cathedral, on the 28th of July following. Handel commenced this work on the 4th of July, but until the rehearsals in Whitehall Chapel, on the 18th and 25th of November, it would seem not a note of it had been previously heard. How it came to pass that five months should have elapsed without a performance of this most remarkable service, is a matter deserving investigation. It could not have taken him long to write, as it occupies in the original manuscript only seventeen and a half sheets of music paper. The exact time of its completion is unknown, for the last page of the original MS. is missing. Although Handel was by no means strong—within two years of sixty—and suffering from a slight return of the paralysis which had bowed him down seven years before, he was at work on the *Semele* when com-

manded to compose this *Te Deum*, and the *Semele* contains some of his clearest and most vigorous writing. The *Te Deum*, therefore, was not very long in hand.

Of all musical renderings of the *Te Deum laudamus*, this by Handel stands first and foremost. It is without rival or parallel, for every great artist has felt the utter hopelessness of even appreciating the intensity of its expression. Probably, no work of Handel has been more studied, and for one hundred years it was annually sung in St. Paul's Cathedral, at the Festival of the Sons of the Clergy.

Handel knew he had only one short hour allowed him for its performance, for he was to write Service, not Oratorio music. But to him who had long learnt that difficult lesson in composition—*what to leave out*, not what to put in—what canons to break, and not to keep—and could always as as Gluck said, "draw blood whenever he pleased"—the fetters thus imposed were of great advantage. He was compelled to condense his thoughts, and hence there are only four movements in his ordinary extended form. He had too, at this season, neither chorus nor orchestra at command. There was no time to dream, and he must only put down what was practicable. He could only rely upon the Court band—such as it was—and probably upon the best instrumentalists of his Lent orchestras. From the processional character of the Introductory Sinfonia, the constant use of the two trumpets. and the assistance of a third trumpet to strengthen the open passages—the jubilant employ of the drums—it is not unreasonable to suppose Handel wrote this work for performance in the cathedral. It was clearly meant for a large place, and when in 1784 it was produced in Westminster Abbey, with seven pair of Trumpets and six double Drums, it came out in some degree with its legitimate expression. Some of the movements will bear a battalion of trumpets and a company of drums, and no number of trombones, bass horns, serpents, other horns, and cornets, would be too

large to develope the greatness of certain passages in this wondrous composition.

A few words upon the Hymn itself:—It is called in the old books, the "Psalm Te Deum," and is of Gallican origin. The poet was Hilary of Poictiers, Hilary of Arles, or Nicetius of Trèves. It is now certain that neither Ambrose nor Augustine had anything to do with it. It was frequently the song of victory on the battle-field. It was sung at Agincourt, and on Bosworth field, when Lord Stanley put the crown on Richmond's head. It is interwoven with the great historical events of Christendom, and the phrase "Te Deum was sung in all the churches," is one constantly to be met with in the page of history. Perhaps the most affecting record of its use is that mentioned of Columbus, who, on the first glimpse of that new world, with which his name is imperishably connected, called his company together, and sang on deck, this very noblest of canticles. It consists of 29 verses; 1 to 13, a Doxology; 14 to 19, a Confession of Faith; and 20 to 29, a Prayer.

SYNOPSIS OF THE MOVEMENTS.

No. 1.

We praise THEE, O GOD:
We acknowledge THEE to be the LORD.

This movement in D major, opens with much propriety, and with Handel's usual attention to the subject in which he had engaged himself. He possessed the great principle of success, "Know what you have to do and do it." The introduction to this chorus is a kind of processional music, such as became the great Battle Hymn, now immediately associated with England's warriors, and a thanksgiving for their victory. Ever solicitous of increasing the power of

his band, he commences with three trumpets, and after some brilliant conversation between trumpets, oboes, and violins, the voices break in with the long-sustained sounds, "We praise THEE, O God." The feeling of size and breadth is appropriate to this enunciation, and accordingly we find that this chorus is written in Handel's broad and extended form. The *alto* voices take up the florid theme, supported by the trumpet, and the full choir reiterate the hemistich in three short notes, affording that vivid and strong contrast which makes Handel's music so delightful. First, the expression was given in long drawn-out sounds—now it bursts on the ear like the shout of an army. The voices travel over these two themes until the first part ends; and the second opens with the latter clause of the verse, "We acknowledge THEE to be the LORD." Here, in the true spirit of adoration, he deepens the key and brings in a new subject, close, varied, full of point, and in fine keeping with what has preceded. This leads to a return of the primal thought. To secure the parallel, we have a repetition—condensed—of the "We acknowledge THEE;" and the chorus terminates with a short peroration on the cardinal points of the key, to which is added, a symphony in keeping with the warlike character of the introduction. The chorus is not very symmetrical, but is full of proportion, that is to say, a sequence of unequal things most vigorously expressed and artfully disposed. Proportion, not symmetry, is the great secret of Handel's method, and gives his movements such vitality, pre-eminence, and durability. He ever remembers the means at command, and this chorus is a splendid illustration of his power to grasp and embody these means.

The florid subject in this movement, which Handel has selected as a theme to work upon, is from a *Te Deum* by a Venetian composer, named URIO (or URIA). Handel had this MS. before him, when writing this *Te Deum*, and has selected some nine or ten of its themes. All great masters

are always masters, although at times they do not disdain the assistance of others. "All men," says a great writer of the present day, "who have sense and feeling, are being continually helped. They are taught by every person whom they meet, and enriched by everything that falls in their way. The greatest is he who has been oftenest aided; and if the attainments of all human minds could be traced to their real sources, it would be found that the world had been laid most under contribution by the men of most original power, and that every day of their existence deepened their debt to their race, *while it enlarged their gifts to it.* The labour devoted to trace the origin of any thought or any invention will usually issue in the blank conclusion, that there is nothing new under the sun. Yet nothing that is truly great, can ever be altogether borrowed; and he is commonly the wisest, and is always the happiest, who receives simply and without envious question, whatever good is given him, with thanks to its immediate giver." Handel, like all great composers, lived a solitary life; he attended no concerts; he gave no evening parties; his harpsichord had great holes worn in its keys—what modern professor would have played upon that? Look at him in his parlour, as he stands at his "walled writing desk," blotting down the records of his *Te Deum.* "One easy chair and cushion, an old stove complete, a walled writing desk, a dressing swing-glass in a black frame, an old bason stand, a wicker fire-screen, a deal chest and bracketts, a square deal box, a large linen press, a small deal book-case and two wig-blocks, fixt." Thus reads the inventory of the contents of his study. To have gone out to hear the music of other people, would only have driven his own thoughts out of his head. Genius consists of perception, combination, and the instant power to embody the result. It is as Napoleon said, "instantaneous calculation"—but calculation implies *some data* with which to work. Now there is nothing harder to do than to sit down suddenly to fill up

a sheet of music paper, with four blank walls around you. Even Haydn was compelled to cry out, "Give me a subject." Handel was often in this difficulty, and so he put his hand into his "square deal box" and drew out a manuscript; not that he was going to copy this or that, but that it was necessary to feed his mind, and afterwards work the matter out honestly and grandly, in his own wondrous and consummate way. Turn to the great points of this *Te Deum*, for example:—

"We acknowledge THEE to be the LORD"

—*that* is not Urio. Again another:—

"The FATHER everlasting,"

neither is that Urio, and thus we may go on from the beginning to the end, and as it respects every new, peculiar, striking, and energetic idea, the amateur or general auditor may assuredly rely on the fact, that none of these things are other than Handel's own creation. In this *Te Deum* are some of the most sublime ideas ever penned. Handel, for the combination of voice and instruments is the greatest man that ever lived. To doubt then, for one moment, that these sublime realities are Handel's, is to suppose an impossibility, for there has never yet lived another who could have written them. Although the florid subject is from Urio, no one need be told that the prolonged burst of sound, "We praise THEE, O God," is Handel's own majestic conception, arising from his right feeling of the magnificence of the Hymn. It will be seen that the first setting of the words, "We praise Thee, O God," occupies no less time than twenty-eight quavers, and as the words are repeated, the time of fifty-six quavers is taken up in singing these four syllables twice. On turning to the next page, the words "We praise THEE," are found to occupy only the time of five quavers. This wonderful change of movements, giving such intensity of expression to the meaning of the words, and such life and energy to the form of the composition, is one of Handel's distinguishing peculiarities, and in which no master ever surpassed him.

No. 2.

All the Earth doth worship THEE :
The FATHER Everlasting.

This movement is also in D major, in three-four time, in three divisions, with a peroration, and very similar to the chorus, "*Exceeding glad,*" in the Coronation Anthem, "*The King shall rejoice,*" as well also to the famous duett, "*The Lord is a man of war,*" in the *Israel in Egypt.* It runs over 106 bars, and the only new sound introduced in the course of the 106 bars, is that which makes A the key for a time. No man excels Handel in that high power of going on in a stream—so long and so sustained—with no other than the materials of his key. With the sparkling passage for the violin (by Urio), and the grand old Canto fermo he learnt when at Rome, he pours forth a glorious breadth of melody—so bright and so clear—twenty-three bars in the key; twenty-four in its higher term A, in parallel and symmetry with what went before; twenty-four in the refrain; and twenty as peroration. He announces his theme, "All the earth doth worship Thee," in seven bars; and the full chorus confirm the enunciation in three short crotchets. He was accustomed to say "Palestrina and the men of that day were too stiff!!" Stiff indeed, in comparison with the use of rhythm and its application to language, as exhibited in this chorus. The constant reiteration of the chords of the three pillars of the key is the cause of great apparent additional power in the chorus and band. The vibrations of the sounds receive no check, and at length the place of performance is one mass of *tone,* not *atmosphere alone;* we feel ourselves breathing music, inhaling and exhaling absolute harmonics, proportions which have been made parts of our very being. "Handel," says Beethoven, "knew best of all of us what to do." He made the orchestra his home, clung to his own music, watched what

told, and what did not; put things down in a way that could be sung and played; in truth, was always natural and honest to himself, intelligible and just to his audience, and ever trying to do the utmost for his subject. He was himself a *reality*, and never pretended to do what he could not, and what he ought not. And thus he liveth with us now, and we all respect him, and he well knew in 1743, when writing this *Te Deum*, that we, the people of another century, should keep him alive, and pay him the respect due to him.

No. 3.

To THEE all Angels cry aloud:
The Heavens and all the powers therein.

At the close of the last chorus, Handel has inserted in his MS. a pause. To mark, no question, the distinction between the doxologies on earth, and those of the Angelic Choir. As to the words "solo" and "semichorus" which disfigure some modern scores of this composition, there is nothing of the kind in the original score. To the *Aria*, "Thou art the King of Glory," Handel has written the name of Mr. Gates (of the Chapel Royal); and the name of Mr. Abbott (of Westminster Abbey), to the other two arie, "When thou tookest upon THEE," and "Vouchsafe, O LORD." There are no other solos in the work.

The "loud cry" of angels and all heavenly powers, the "voice of many waters," the voice of "mighty thunderings," is transcribed by Handel into such music as makes most composers melancholy. Here they feel how little they know, and how immeasurably the Saxon stands away from all others. What shall we say of it? What can we say of it? "Words!"—words are of no use. "Draw its plan?" You may write it on your thumbnail. "But are there no laws of arrangement?" Yes, but he has

broken them all. He tells us the laws of composition are unteachable; that his mind had a range and power to which criticism has not yet applied itself, and that there is no rule to guide his invention. It is a movement of amazing power. The violins play something suggested by Urio, and then Handel begins; the soprani personating the angels, and the men—chorus—the heavenly powers. The plan is twofold. First, B; then G, answered by F; then A. We doubt not scores of theorists will say "it is all irregular," and for this reason we rarely find Handel quoted as an authority in any foreign treatise on music. Our part is to be thankful and sing such movements as this, until they are understood and loved as they should be.

No. 4.

4. To THEE, Cherubin and Seraphin:
   Continually do cry.
5. HOLY, HOLY, HOLY:
   LORD GOD OF SABAOTH;
6. Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty:
   Of THY Glory.

Handel had his "Hallelujah" of the Messiah in his mind's-eye when composing this Sanctus. There is the same energetic expression of the strong man, the same nobleness of emotion, the same strength of judgment—honesty and clearness in purpose. There is the broad and sustained subject:—"HOLY, HOLY, HOLY: LORD GOD OF SABAOTH," combined with the *fire* of repetition on the word *continually*, like to the Canto fermo "For the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth," united to the ring of reiterated Hallelujahs; there is the ascent of the soprani, D to E, E to F, F to G, as in the passage, "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." But then, the last sixteen bars of this chorus "Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty of THY Glory." In hearing passages

like this, we are more than half inclined to believe the composer was in some sense *inspired*. The simplicity of the thought is no less remarkable than its wondrous propriety. And then that pause!* We say to ourselves "Why was it not done before," it is the only thing with which to close the Sanctus. But then it never was done before—it never will be done again. And as there is one Hallelujah Chorus, so there is one Sanctus, and the same hand did both.

No. 5.

7. The glorious company of the Apostles :
   Praise THEE,
8. The goodly fellowship of the Prophets :
   Praise THEE,
9. The noble army of Martyrs :
   Praise THEE,
10. The Holy Church throughout all the world :
    Doth acknowledge THEE,
11. The FATHER :
    Of an infinite Majesty.

There is nothing more difficult to the artist than to keep up success. Handel had well realized the Sanctus in seventy-two bars of eight quaver motion—equally the time of 576 quavers — he had consumed much of his allowed time—he has aroused the strongest feelings of human nature. What more could he do? This present movement is a chant, far more in unison, with a roll on the words PRAISE THEE, for women and boys; and at the end there are ten bars, expressing the confession of the Holy Church, acknowledging

"The FATHER :
Of an infinite Majesty."

* We have never fairly forgiven Mendelssohn for taking this grand thought—so exceedingly beautiful—and thrusting it into a Chorus to Baal.

The time is still eight quavers—still andante only *non presto*, the key is a mere change from D to G. And yet in this one movement he transcends himself, for having for some time omitted altogether any reference to "the key within the key," he suddenly changes the formula and rises to the third above. The high and sustained emotion of this movement is unapproachable. No composer has rivalled or ever can rival it. It is the hand of a giant, marking down the strongest expressions in their shortest forms. The E below the key, with its minor thirds, is removed to make way for the B, the third above with all its bright major thirds. We feel that it is right, and in this case Handel shews us the law he acted upon. This noble declaration of the Divine Nature of the first Person of the Blessed Trinity, is one other instance of Handel's subtle apprehension of the *reality* of the scene, and of the true grandeur of his spirit. It is a glorious burst of earnest, unchangable faith, befitting the congregation of Christians.

No. 6.

12. Thine honourable, true: and only Son.
13. Also the Holy Ghost: the Comforter.

This short chorus expressing adoration of the Son and the Holy Ghost, calls forth no more particular remark than that from the point "Also the Holy Ghost," the music is said to be by Urio. This is possible, and perhaps Handel preferred using the thoughts of another as a relief to the higher expression of the three last movements. He could well afford to do so.

SECOND PART.

No. 7.

14. Thou art the King of Glory:
O CHRIST.

Here begins the Second Part of this ancient Hymn, or more particular address to the Lord Christ, with a confession of belief in the great truths of the Incarnation, the Second Advent, etc. This verse is first set as a bass solo, and confirmed by a chorus. The aria is accompanied by the trumpet. The themes are open and bold, and supported by divisions, which, although not very new to Handel's hearers, were never better put down. It is clear, unaffected, condensed, and full of power. The chorus repeat the confession with equal distinctness and positiveness. The little episode in counterpoint is from Urio, which, as Handel has introduced it into the chorus, "Then round about the starry frame" (Samson), it may be imagined it was a jewel he liked, and scrupled not to re-set.

No. 8.

16. When THOU tookest upon THEE to deliver man:
THOU didst not abhor the Virgin's womb.

This is a *Larghetto* in a form of which Handel has left many examples, and is written for a high bass or tenor voice. It is more calm and pensive than strong and passionate, and the divisions are here and there too long and extended, but it impresses by its delightful ease and freedom, enforcing the fact enunciated in the spirit of contemplation, and dwelling thereupon with humility and thankfulness.

No. 9.

27. When THOU had'st overcome the sharpness of Death: THOU didst open the kingdom of Heaven to all believers.

The first hemistich is etched just as so solemn a thought should be. "When THOU hadst *overcome*"—the change from the chromatic to the natural (F sharp to F natural) startles by its weighty truth, and the unexpected turn of the G sharp, on the words "The sharpness of death," is a grand example of realistic power. It is in these brief kind of harmonized choral recitations, that Handel demonstrates the range of his imagination and the forciful methods of his mechanism. His command of the chromatic sounds was enormous—his employ of them ever majestic and precious. The burst of trumpets, drums, combined with a jubilant roll for the voices, proclaim the Messiah's conquest over the grave and the opening of the gates of Paradise to all his servants. The themes of this movement are from *Urio*, but the responsive and sustained flow is Handel's own spirit. It is very complete and perfect in its execution, and is as highly finished as is any movement he ever wrote.

No. 10.

18. Thou sittest at the right hand of God: In the glory of the Father.

This movement, although not described as a trio, bears internal evidence that it was not written as a chorus. Good in a cathedral as a trio, it would be better as a *semi-chorus* for some thirty-two voices in a large hall, and its execution by such a number of voices, would give a more appropriate expression to the consolation derived from the fact declared in the verse. It is written in Handel's long form, and is thoroughly finished; teeming with elegant and beautiful ideas, full of life and variety.

No. 11.

19. We believe that Thou shalt come :
To be our Judge.

The importance of this verse is scarcely to be recognized, if limited to only three voices. The silence of the band is a noble idea of the composer, but the perfect conception of the poetry demands the acknowledgment of the whole choir. The harmony is broad, and it should be grandly and solemnly represented.

THIRD PART.

No. 12.

20. We therefore pray Thee, help Thy servants :
Whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood.
21. Make them to be numbered with Thy Saints :
In glory everlasting.
22. O Lord, save Thy people :
And bless Thine heritage.
23. Govern them :
And lift them up for ever.

This chorus is preceded by a duet for the two trumpets, which should either be harmonized for a full brass band, or omitted altogether. As it stands, it is not *real*, and is an interruption to the progress of the Hymn. Handel's portraiture of this prayer is beyond measure, marvellous. Such tenderness, such submission, such a faithful representation and realization of the blessings sought and requested. It commences with a lowly, quiet, humble yearning, rising into one energetic earnestness, "Make them to be numbered," and ascending to an entreaty, resistless and not to be denied—"And lift them up for ever," the vehemence of faith—like that of Moses on the Mount—the passionate act of certain and assured belief. It may not be a *necessity* to admit the co-operation of music, in acts of supplication, but if anything be ever wanting to give them fresh impulse and vitality, it will be

found in the influence of such music as this. It is the express spirit of adoration, without flaw or imperfection. No one has ever, with greater fidelity, pourtrayed this pleading and earnest prayer of the Christian Church for these last twelve hundred years, nor has Handel himself in any other work, in so few a number of bars, condensed such earnestness of perception, and such supernatural energy in its realization. The first idea of the last subject, "And lift them up for ever," stands in the body of the MS. as a faint conception of what now is printed. A leaf wafered on the page containing the present rendering, shews it was a more clear and more vigorous feeling that led him to the change.

No. 15.

24. Day by Day: we magnify Thee;
25. And we worship Thy name: ever world without end.

Here is a return to the act of praise, and with these verses closes the Doxological portion of the Hymn. The contrast here is so great that we can hardly imagine the same hand traced this first chorus and the three preceding it. The trumpet passage is from *Urio*, but otherwise the chorus is Handel's, and the repetitions of the words "Day by Day" quite in his simple and truthful manner. The closing fugue "And we worship Thy name," is worked upon a theme by *Urio*, but the clear, manful, and firm way in which the chorus progresses, tells us that it is the work of the master himself, and at the close he comes out in all his power and magnificence.

No. 17—Solo Bass.

26. Vouchsafe, O Lord: to keep us this day without sin.
27. O Lord, Have mercy upon us:
    Have mercy upon us.
28. O Lord, let Thy mercy lighten upon us:
    As our trust is in Thee.

This is one of the everliving phenomena of Handel's genius. There was nothing like this in the world of

music until he lived. There will be nothing like it again, for imitation is hopeless. It is the very tenderness of faith and love, veiled in the mystery of power. The blaze of light beaming from the last chorus has left its warmth in his heart, and now full of strong aspirations, he pleads with wonderful utterance for preservation in purity and continuance in favour, for "Our trust is in THEE."

No. 18.

29. O LORD in THEE have I trusted:
Let me never be confounded.

The ancient mode of closing the *Te Deum* was that of a staid and solemn strain, but Handel following the fashion of his contemporaries, and to suit his composition to circumstances and expectations, has employed the full chorus and orchestra. It is one of his Rondo-like movements; a minuet in its form, but made strong and solid by his episodes of suspended harmony. It is as clear as sunlight; accurate and forceful it flows onward in a stream of charming melody, mild rather than majestic, full of satisfaction and repose. And thus closes this most remarkable and unrivalled rendering of the Hymn of the sixth century.

As a musical setting of the *Te Deum* it is the only one that lives. It has lately been neglected, because heard too often, and not performed too well. Now that it escapes the cathedral, it will be studied, practised, realized, and assume its right position, one to which it is entitled, as being in many respects the shortest but strongest manifestation of Handel's genius—of the highest magnitude as a work of art, and an object of unceasing admiration, whether looked upon as a specimen of his choral music, or as an example of his truth and devotion.